



Klamath Network Featured Creature

February 2010

Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The ringtail is named for the striking alternating black and white rings on its tail. Its scientific name translates to “cunning little fox,” but ringtails are more closely related to raccoons. They are a little smaller than a house cat, and because they are usually friendly and successful mousers, some miners or settlers kept them as pets, yielding their other common name “miner’s cat.” In addition to mice, the omnivorous ringtail will eat wood rats, berries, soft fruits, and insects. Foxes, bobcats, and coyotes are known to prey on ringtails, with great horned owls being the most feared predator.

Ringtails are nocturnal and spend the majority of the day asleep. They are agile climbers and have two features that allow them to climb so well: ankle joints that can rotate over 180 degrees, allowing them to descend trees head first; and a long tail that aids in balance and acrobatic maneuvers such as cartwheels.

Habitat:

Ringtails occupy brushy and wooded areas, preferably along watercourses. They are more common at low to mid elevations but have been observed up to 2,600 m (~8,500 ft).

Not being overly particular about a den site, ringtails will inhabit tree hollows, rock crevices, abandoned burrows, and buildings. They move den sites frequently. Unless the weather is bad, they will rarely spend more than three nights in one den.

Distribution:

Bassariscus astutus can be found throughout the southwest United States.



<http://mtfeltmoore.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/ringtailcat.jpg>



<http://sites.google.com/a/yni.org/fieldguide/Home/biotoc/ringtail>



http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=21

Reproduction and Adult Stage:

Ringtails are solitary animals and only come together to mate. Mating takes place in late winter or early spring. Females are only receptive to males for 24 to 36 hours.

Gestation takes 51-54 days. Litters mostly have 1-4 young but 5 have been observed. Newborns begin to eat solid food at 30-40 days and begin to walk well at 6 weeks, climb at 8, and are weaned at 10.

Conservation Status:

This species is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, as the species is common and widely distributed from central to northern Mexico, and adapts well to disturbed areas.

The ringtail is legally trapped for fur in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas, where it is also caught incidentally in traps set for valuable fur-bearers such as foxes and raccoon. Pelts sell for between 5-12 dollars.

Where to see it in the Klamath

Parks:

Ringtails are confirmed at Whiskeytown NRA, Redwood NSP, and Oregon Caves NM. Its presence at Lassen Volcanic and Crater Lake NPs is unconfirmed.

More Information:

Jameson, E. W., and H. J. Peeters. Mammals of California. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA.

Smithsonian Museum of Natural History.
http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=21.

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
<http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/41680/0>